

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MEDAN 0028

EO 11652: GDS

SUBJECT: GOI CRACKDOWN ON STUDENTS

REF: MEDAN 23

1. IN A CALL JAN. 23 ON THE CHIEF OF INTELLIGENCE, COLONEL GUNARSO, OF KOWILHAN I, THE MILITARY COMMAND AREA FOR SUMATRA AND WEST KALIMANTAN, TO DISCUSS ANOTHER SUBJECT, I BROUGHT UP THE REPORT OF STUDENT ARRESTS AND CLOSURE OF NEWSPAPERS IN JAKARTA OVER THE WEEKEND. GUNARSO IMMEDIATELY LAUNCHED INTO AN ANIMATED AND IMPASSIONED DEFENSE OF THESE MOVES. HE SAID THESE WERE PREVENTIVE ACTIONS TO HEAD OFF ANY POSSIBILITY OF A REPEAT OF THE MALARI RIOTS OF JANUARY 1974. THE MILITARY COULD NOT LONGER TOLERATE, HE ADDED, THE INCREASINGLY STRIDENT ACCUSATIONS OF THE STUDENTS AGAINST THE PRESIDENT AND AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. HE CLAIMED THAT THE STUDENTS EXAGGERATED GRIEVANCES, THAT THE HARD LINERS AMONG THEM HAD REFUSED TO BALANCE PROBLEMS WITH PROGRESS THAT HAD BEEN MADE, AND THAT THEY WERE CONSEQUENTLY BEING USED BY ANTI-GOVERNMENT GROUPS. HE SCOFFED AT THE STUDENTS' INSISTENCE THAT UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES WERE FREE AND NOT SUBJECT TO MILITARY INTRUSIONS; HE ARGUED THAT AFTER ALL, THE UNIVERSITIES HAD BEEN BUILT BY THE GOVERNMENT AND THE GOVERNMENT THEREFORE HAD EVERY RIGHT TO TAKE WHATEVER STEPS THEY

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WANTED ON CAMPUS. I SUGGESTED THAT PERHAPS THESE LATEST MEASURES MIGHT WELL AGGRAVATE RATHER THAN CALM THE SITUATION, PARTICULARLY IF THEY PROVOKED GREATER SUPPORT BEYOND THE STUDENT AGITATORS. HE INSISTED THAT IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT STEPS BE TAKEN NOW TO SHOW BEYOND ANY MEASURE OF DOUBT TO ALL DISSIDENTS THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT TOLERATE THESE ACTIVITIES AND THAT NATIONAL SECURITY CAME FIRST AND FOREMOST.

2. I ASKED IF ANY STUDENTS HAD BEEN ARRESTED IN MEDAN; HE CHOSE NOT TO GIVE A DIRECT REPLY, MERELY EMPHASIZING THAT THE MILITARY WERE PREPARED TO MAKE ARRESTS HERE IF NECESSARY. HE SPECULATED, HOWEVER, THAT THE STUDENTS IN KOWILHAN I TERRITORY WERE DIFFERENT FROM THOSE IN JAVA IN THAT THEY ALREADY UNDERSTOOD THEIR POSITION VIS-A-VIS THE AUTHORITIES.

3. COMMENT: WE WOULD TEND TO SHARE GUNARSO'S CONJECTURE THAT THE MILITARY AUTHORITIES HAVE THINGS UNDER FIRM CONTROL IN THIS AREA AND ARE NOT UNDUELY CONCERNED ABOUT THE STUDENTS AND THE PRESS. WE HAVE HAD NO SEPARATE REPORTS OF ARRESTS OF STUDENTS; ALL THE NEWSPAPERS IN MEDAN PUBLISHED TODAY. THE UNUSUALLY INSULTING SLOGANS OF THE STUDENT PROTEST GROUP THAT VISITED THE NORTH SUMATRA LEGISLATURE ON JANUARY 19 (SEE REFTTEL) PROBABLY TOOK THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES BY SURPRISE. THE GENERAL WHO HEADS THE UNIVERSITY, HARRY SUWONDO, HAS ISSUED A PUBLIC STATEMENT ACKNOWLEDGING THAT HE HAD PERMITTED TWENTY STUDENTS TO LEAVE THE CAMPUS FOR THE CALL ON THE LEGISLATURE BUT THAT HE DEPLORED THEIR UNEXPECTED USE OF VULGAR AND ABUSIVE LANGUAGE. HOW, HE WAILED, COULD MY STUDENTS ACT LIKE THAT? MOST LIKELY THEY WILL NOT GET AWAY WITH EVEN SUCH RELATIVELY MILD, AND CERTAINLY ORDERLY, PROTEST AGAIN.
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